

# Understanding Anonymity

So many in Alcoholics Anonymous, both old-timers and newcomers alike, do not have an understanding of the 11th and 12th Traditions relating to Anonymity; the relationship of Anonymity to the Spiritual Ideals contained in the 12 Steps of AA; and the principles and ideals of Trust, Honesty, Hope, Faith, Courage, Integrity, Willingness, Humility, Brotherly Love, Justice, Perseverance, Spirituality, and Service to One Another.

To the extent that my sponsors explained it to me, and from what I have read from the history of AA, I will try to put this vital issue into some kind of proper perspective.

These selections from AA literature clarify the 11th Tradition and its intent.

In some sections of AA, anonymity is carried to the point of real absurdity. Members are on such a poor basis of communication that they don't even know each other's last names or where each lives.

*- As Bill Sees it, page 241*

Dr. Bob said there were two ways to break the Anonymity Tradition:

- (1) – by giving your name at the public level of press or radio;
- (2) – by being so anonymous that you can't be reached by other drunks.

*- Dr. Bob and the Good Old Timers,  
page 264*

The 11th Tradition states, in the short form, "Eleven – Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press,

radio and films." (And we might also add TV at this level for further restriction)

The 12th Tradition states, in the short form, "Twelve – Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities." (Even before my own personality)

Dr. Bob stated that within the group, every member should know the first name, last name, address and phone number of all the members in the group. If these are not known, then we as a group are operating above the level of anonymity intended – We are not able to be of Service to One Another in Time of Need.

Did you ever try to look up someone in the phone book (like your sponsor, or someone you're related to, when your head was putting it on you??) without knowing their last name? Or go into a hospital or jail to try to visit or carry a meeting into a sick or incarcerated member, and stand there with your mouth hanging open, when asked, "What is their name?"

## **No Name, No Visit, No Meeting.**

"Sorry about that but we have our policies and procedures, sorry we can't help you."

Let us see what the long form of the 11th and 12th Traditions can give us in understanding Anonymity and the Principles we ought to live by.

*11. – Our relations with the general public should be characterized by personal anonymity. We think A. A. ought to avoid sensational advertising. Our names and pictures as AA members ought not be broadcast, filmed or publicly printed. Our public relations should be*

*guided by the principle of attraction rather than promotion. There is never need to praise ourselves. We feel it better to let our friends recommend us.*

12. – *And finally, we of Alcoholics Anonymous believe that the principle of anonymity has an immense spiritual significance. It reminds us that we are to place principles before personalities; that we are actually to practice a genuine humility. This to the end that our great blessings may never spoil us; that we shall forever live in thankful contemplation of Him who presides over us all.*

Ahh yes. We are to be anonymous relative to the "General Public", as members of Alcoholics Anonymous. We ought not be publicly identified as members of Alcoholics Anonymous in the press, on the radio, or in films, videos, and TV, media which is disseminated to the General Public. It is a Humility thing; we have no need to say "How great we are!". We think that in this respect the Humility of AA will attract more suffering alcoholics to the program than any amount of advertising or promotion. It is a matter of Trust.

Dr. Bob's comment –

"Since our Tradition on anonymity designates the exact level where the line should be held, it must be obvious to everyone who can read and understand the English language that to maintain anonymity at any other level is definitely a violation of this Tradition. The AA who hides his identity from his fellow AA by using only a given name violates the Tradition just as much as the AA who permits his name to appear in the press in connection with matters pertaining to AA.

*"The former is maintaining his anonymity ABOVE the level of press, radio, and films, and the latter is maintaining his anonymity BELOW the level of press, radio, and films - whereas the Tradition states that we should maintain our*

*anonymity AT the level of press, radio, and films."*

Our egos are trying to get attention. We can lose our humility and we are spoiling the great blessing we have been given. The truth is that any one of us may fail to stay sober as a result of our ego and failure to practice the steps in all our affairs. We should be ever mindful that no action we take as individual members should affect AA as a whole of AA. Our very lives depend upon the survival of AA and our Unity. Without AA, all we have left is drunkenness and the slide into oblivion.

The principle of Trust is first and foremost, the foundation of all spiritual principles and ideals, that we should never break another member's anonymity to anyone outside the AA group. To do so would break Trust, and without Trust, all the other principles are Imimpossible.

Has any alcoholic ever been able to be Honest, or practice any of the other principles and ideals, with something or someone he didn't trust?

Of course not...

We may break our own anonymity in the process of trying to help another, but we must never break the anonymity of another.

When TRUST is broached, resentments raise their ugly heads, and all the other principles are out the window, and often times Sobriety. That is why it is so important that no member should ever broach another member's confidence... and especially any broach of confidence between a sponsor and sponsee. This applies as well to any and all gossiping between members about what another member did or said.

I well remember what my sponsors burnt into my mind,

"That I should never take any action that would endanger another member's sobriety, because in so doing I endanger my own..."

And that included hitting on members of the opposite sex, especially newcomers.

Probably more members lose their sobriety for this single reason, than all others combined, as a result of the resentments and gossip that rear their ugly heads.

Newcomers are so very vulnerable, so naive, so confused, so fearful, and looking for anything that

will fill that god-awful hole in the gut, for any little bit of acceptance, that any broaching of TRUST can send them into a resentment that could mean their Sobriety and their Life. Their Anonymity, Sobriety, Well-Being and Trust must be protected.

They are the Life Blood of Alcoholics Anonymous.

We protect these things by keeping our own yaps shut – To Protect Our Own Sobriety.